



# IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **IDAHO COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$12.8 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE**

Last year, Idaho County residents and businesses received \$12.8 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 15,400 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Idaho County ranks number 21 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The investment of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$833 for every man, woman and child residing in Idaho County. This includes citizens who may not receive a single direct service from the Department. The statewide average is \$839 per capita.

The Department distributed \$1.15 billion in Idaho communities in 2004. These funds came from Medicaid, additional payments to hospitals, Food Stamps, the Idaho Child Care Program, the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program, foster care and a variety of other assistance programs.

"This is an investment for all Idaho County residents," says Health & Welfare Director Karl Kurtz. "These are tax dollars put to good use because they are used to help people become healthy and productive. This money goes go to foster care for children in crisis, substance abuse treatment for adults and adolescents, improvements and operations at local hospitals, and dozens of other badly needed services."

"This is as much about sustaining communities as it is investing," adds Kurtz. "By providing programs that support people, we are helping communities and their residents build the endurance and strength they need to remain vital. Everyone profits from this investment, not just those who use Department programs. This isn't just me pounding my chest. That's what community leaders tell us."

“We’re a poor county, and we have had some downturns in the timber industry,” says Idaho County Commission Chairman Randy Doman. “We have a disproportionately large older population. This drives our Medicaid costs. Medicaid keeps our people healthy and allows them to carry on and live here. The medical community has provided quite a few jobs here and a lot of that is driven by Medicaid. It does take some of the pressure off our indigent care program.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$10.8 million on health care for residents of the county. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like Irwin Drug in Grangeville. “It has tremendous impact on our business,” says store owner Irwin Johnson. “It pays our payroll and the money circulates out into the community. There are two pharmacists and two pharm techs. Without Medicaid we would have to cut back on staff and operations.”

The story is much the same at Syringa General Hospital. “The extra payments we receive are absolutely critical,” says Hospital Administrator Jess Hawley. “We have such a high percentage of Medicaid and Medicare clients that our contractual obligations are very large. The (FUPL and DSH) payments help us keep our doors open.” The extra payments are from the Federal Upper Payment Limits (FUPL) and Disproportionate Share (DSH) programs. They are made to some hospitals that have a larger than average number of Medicaid clients. The payments help compensate hospitals for low Medicaid reimbursement rates.

Last year, the two Idaho County hospitals received \$255,000 in FUPL and DSH payments in addition to reimbursement for inpatient and outpatient costs of Medicaid clients. All Medicaid payments to the hospitals totaled nearly \$1.2 million.

Idaho County residents received \$764,000 in Food Stamps to help feed their families. Local grocers redeemed \$912,900, including Food Stamp money from nearby counties. Asker’s Harvest Foods in Grangeville redeemed \$127,400.

Manager Brad Wassmuth says those receipts are “very important,” about four percent of sales. He has 42 full- and part-time employees. “It at least allows us to sustain our workforce, and it creates jobs, too,” he says. “If we didn’t have it, we would lose two to three people.”

Department spending helps people, and it has an upside for business, according to Idaho economist John Church. “This is not lost money. The spending is an investment. It goes back into the economy. If an employer came to town and spent this much money we would be elated. People need to remember that a big chunk of this is federal money which is a huge return on our taxes. This comes back and helps stimulate the economy and it helps people.”

Kurtz says, “Not only is the Department money a human investment, but it creates jobs and maintains healthy businesses. These dollars recycle numerous times in each community and help us keep the high quality of life we enjoy in Idaho. This is a wise use of taxpayer dollars because the money spent in the community often stays in the community. These dollars are spent again and again to help create jobs and an infrastructure that provides healthy and safe neighborhoods.”

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**(Editors:** Interviews are available on request. Contact Ross Mason at 334-0693 or Regional Director Dave Reynolds at 799-4338 for more information.)

**More information on Health & Welfare’s  
investment in every Idaho County  
can be found online at  
<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>**